

We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness
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Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Angst, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Jonathan B., Nancy W.

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-08-17 09:29:45

Updated: 2016-08-17 09:29:45

Packaged: 2019-12-17 14:34:26

Rating: K+

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,643

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: One-shot. Jonathan and Nancy post S1 finale.

We shall meet in the place where there is no darkness

If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself.

There's a pre-monster and a post-monster reality and somehow Jonathan decides that these two should match as closely as possible. It's for everybody's own good, he thinks. Or maybe just his own. Nevertheless, the plan is as simple as possible: avoid people (*Nancy*) at school (*everywhere*). Turns out it's ridiculously easy. They were never hanging out with the same crowd, or any crowd in Jonathan's case, and she's busy trying to go back to her normality anyway. In both realities he's a pretentious creep and she's just another suburban girl. The only time they seemed to forget to play their parts was when they were chasing a flower-faced monster from another dimension. It just doesn't bode well for a meaningful relationship of any kind. She waves at him at school a few times and invites him once to join her and Steve for lunch. He comes up with an excuse so transparent she stops asking altogether. It's for the best anyway. Avoiding Nancy means also avoiding *Nancy and Steve* because that's both the pre- and the post-monster reality too. And frankly, it was just easier hating the guy before the whole saving each other's lives thing.

In those last weeks of 1983 Jonathan slowly settles into this old/new routine of his: Get Will safely to school, get himself to school, drive Will safely home, work, pretend to sleep. The sleeping part is difficult. His home is a constant reminder of all the bad (and the surprising good) that came with their ordeal. Hopper helps them cover the walls with a layer of fresh cream paint and gets rid of the burnt carpet in the corridor. It's easy and efficient, and by the time he's done you wouldn't think a life or death battle ever took place in that old house. Turns out it's slightly harder to do the same with unwanted thoughts and memories. His little brother has been traumatised enough for the three of them, so Jonathan plasters a supportive smile on his face and buries his own nightmares deep in a box containing pieces of underexposed photos and a stolen gun.

And then she, no, it's not just her, *they* get him a new camera and he doesn't think his plan works as well as he thought it would. The very

first picture he takes with it is of Will in their freshly renovated living room. He carefully checks every shadow in the photo for a lurking monster and briefly wonders what would Nancy think of such impulse. The perfect Nancy with her perfect grades and her perfect skin and her perfect boyfriend. The not-so-perfect Nancy with her soft hands that don't shake when they fire a gun. As it turns out his aching heart is perfect to be stocking all the wrong feelings for pretty, badass girls who don't care about him that way.

Suddenly it's 1984 and he almost fools himself into thinking he can handle it all. For Mike's birthday he drives the whole gang all the way to Indianapolis. The boys spend hours in a comic books store bickering about a new character in Thor and other things he has no idea about. Spending 10 hours with four hyper 12-year-olds turns out much more exhausting than he thought it would be but Will laughs and for a moment looks less pale so Jonathan knows it was worth it.

He ignores the sinking feeling that he can never go back to his pre-monster reality.

Perhaps one did not want to be loved so much as to be understood.

There's a pre-monster and a post-monster reality and Nancy quickly decides that these two can never be the same. How can they be? She's not the same. Her little brother is not the same. Even her parents seem different. She wants to embrace the new reality as best as she can but between a dead best friend, grieving Mike and a constantly apologetic boyfriend, things are tough.

That Christmas Nancy gives Jonathan a new camera and gets a bottle of Charlie perfume from Steve. She smiles brightly at his eagerness and thanks him with a sweet, chaste kiss. He doesn't need to know that she replaced floral sweetness by oppressing dark woods and dusty particles floating in the toxic wasteland. That she left everything that Charlie stood for in a rotting place along with a corpse of her best friend. He's trying so hard to be the best boyfriend, to deserve the old Nancy. He doesn't need to know she doesn't exist anymore. She can pretend a bit longer.

She spends 40 minutes trying to find an outfit for the Snow Ball.

Everything seems too bright, too cheerful, too pink (*is that my dress?*). She digs out an elegant black dress but it's the one she wore at Will's not-actual-funeral back when she still had hope for a different outcome. She can picture Barbara rolling her eyes at this. "Just wear the stupid dress," she can almost hear her say.

She finally picks out a dark green one with too puffy sleeves but no painful memories attached to it.

"You look nice," her mum tells her, fastening a small pearl bracelet around her wrist. "My grandma used to say that pearls are barometer of one's soul. They shine brightly if the person wearing them is happy."

Nancy pretends not to notice their dullness all through the evening. She dances with Steve and sings "Girls Just Want to Have Fun", and doesn't mind sneaking out back to make out with him halfway through the evening. She doesn't think about her best friend who will never mock her silly relationship drama again. She doesn't think about Mike and his innocent, broken heart. She certainly doesn't think about Jonathan.

But late at night when she changes into the safety of her warm pyjamas she tells herself with as much conviction as she can gather, "You face things, Nancy. It's in your nature. Tomorrow will be different."

She goes to see Footloose with Steve instead.

She ignores the sinking feeling that she's twisting her world to match her pre-monster reality.

If you loved someone, you loved him, and when you had nothing else to give, you still gave him love.

He's laying on the hood of his car, camera on his chest, intensely staring at rapidly darkening sky.

"I see you're practising the whole pretentious artist routine," she tells him jokingly.

He doesn't reply but a ghost of a smile briefly appears on his face. She takes it as a sign of good mood and an invitation to join him. She sits on his left and carefully leans back until she feels the windshield beneath her upper body.

There's a carefully measured distance securing this non-friendship between them. Not too close but not too far either. Not quite friends. Not quite more. She feels his fingers twitch and she wonders if he's resisting the need to touch her hand. He's probably just stretching them.

There's a perpetual sadness lingering on the edges of his entire being. Like a weight of the world was never completely lifted off his shoulders. She really wants to ask him why. They're already barely speaking so it's not like things between them can get any worse. She asks.

"I don't understand why we expect to be happy in life. Like it's some sort of unspoken rule that sooner or later we will all find happiness. Like all we need is a little patience, a little trust," he says with a bitter conviction of someone who has seen the worst in life. "It doesn't work that way. It's not a prerequisite condition with which we're born."

It's probably the most she has ever heard him talk. She's not exactly surprised by his reply but it's not what she hoped to hear either.

"That's such bullshit, Jonathan," she tells him with a resigned sigh. She absentmindedly traces the faded line in the palm of her hand.

He looks at her gesture and a matching scar he carries with him like a link to a different Jonathan and a different Nancy that should not be forgotten.

It's all so ridiculous. Their teenage angst and misery, and they were *monster hunting* just a few months ago. And he can't help it. He laughs. He laughs which startles her so much she almost slides off his car. It makes him laugh harder and harder, and soon she joins him. It seems like a foreign sound, that laugh of theirs, like a language belonging to a yet unfamiliar world.

They're not there yet. She's still living her suburban rebellion with Steve who problematically enough turned out to be a decent guy. He's still socially inept loner with voyeuristic tendencies. But in this multitude of universes there must be one with a happy Nancy and a happy Jonathan. Maybe some day it could be this one.

AN/ This show. Oh this show. Got such a kick out of it (although as a non American my 80s childhood was a bit different). All the titles are from Orwell's *1984* because I'm nothing if not predictable. There's also a direct quote about Nancy from *Nightmare on Elm Street* because both Nancies are awesome.

Needs proofreading because I literally wrote it on my phone while on holidays.